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✓ Latest release

Australian Statistics Advisory Council - Annual Report

Outlines the functions and activities of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council during 2024–25

Reference period: 2024-25 financial year

23/10/2025

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Members of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia, where we work, learn and live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to their cultures and Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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ISSN 01550780

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Letter of transmittal

Letter of transmittal



The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP
Assistant Minister for Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am pleased to submit the Australian Statistics Advisory Council's annual report for the year ending 30 June 2025.

The report outlines the work and activities of the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under subsection 24(1) of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975.

The Annual Report is dated on the day I approved the text for printing.

Yours sincerely



Professor Emeritus Ian Harper AO

Chair

25 September 2025

Foreword

Foreword



ASAC Chair, Professor Emeritus Ian Harper AO

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC, the Council) has a key role in assisting the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to enhance its effectiveness as a public institution. The ABS is Australia's national statistical agency and the ABS' purpose is to inform Australia's important decisions by delivering relevant, trusted and objective data, statistics and insights. Better decisions based on better data make for improvement in the welfare of all Australians. The Council advises the ABS and its Minister on improving Australia's statistical services and draws together perspectives from State and Territory governments, public sector agencies and representatives of private industry and academia. This assists the ABS to set priorities among the competing demands for its services, and to ensure that its decisions are accountable to major users of public data.

The Council met three times during 2024–25. The Council's meetings helped to build understanding of challenges faced around Australia and in different sectors of the economy, and the role of statistics in addressing them.

This annual report summarises ASAC's activities over the past year and identifies future areas of focus. I thank Council members for their active engagement with the business of the Council at each meeting. On behalf of the Council, I also thank members of the ASAC Secretariat for their logistical and technical support of the Council's affairs.

Professor Emeritus Ian Harper AO
Chair

Chapter 1: About ASAC

Legislation

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975 (the ABS Act) establishes the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC, the Council) to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on Australia's statistical services and statistical priorities.

Purpose

To contribute to the effective development of Australia's statistical assets, by providing the Minister and the Australian Statistician with independent, relevant, and timely advice on national priorities.

Role

ASAC contributes to ABS decision-making on statistical priorities and helps inform its assessment of risks and development of strategies. ASAC also advocates for a national statistical system that is adequately resourced and effectively managed.

The Minister and the Australian Statistician may seek advice from the Council on statistical matters.

Operations of the Council

The Council consists of a part-time Chair, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between ten and twenty-two part-time members. The Council includes a representative from each State and Territory nominated by the respective Premier or Chief Minister, and representatives from academia, business and the community sector.

The Minister appoints the Council Chair for five years and members for up to three years. Members are eligible for reappointment when their terms expire. Appendix 1 lists the names and positions of members as at 30 June 2025.

The Council typically meets three times each year in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney by rotation. The Council may also interact out of session on any specific matters requiring its attention.

The Chair receives an annual fee as set by the Remuneration Tribunal. Other Council Members do not receive any fees but may receive a prescribed travel allowance to support their attendance at meetings.

Costs associated with the operations of ASAC are met from the ABS budget, and secretariat services are provided by ABS staff. Council secretariat services include:

- arranging and supporting meetings
- administering ASAC activities and memberships
- assisting with preparation of ASAC's Annual Report
- drafting submissions, correspondence or papers issued under the authority of the Council or the Chair.

Chapter 2: Year in Review: 2024–25

Responsible Minister

During 2024–25, the Minister responsible for the ABS and ASAC was the Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP, Assistant Minister for

Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury.

Delivery against 2024–25 Priorities

The ASAC Annual Report 2023–24 articulated the priorities for 2024–25 as:

1. Advise on the ABS work program under resource constraints.
2. Assist in clarifying ABS roles and responsibilities within an evolving data landscape.
3. Assist in building and maintaining community trust.
4. Advise on opportunities.
5. Monitor and advise on the 2026 Census program.

The Council held three meetings during 2024–25: July 2024, November 2024, and March 2025 (see Appendix 2 for meeting agendas).

ASAC has played a crucial role throughout 2024–25 in supporting the ABS during a period of significant transformation and ongoing challenge

1. Advise on ABS work program

At each ASAC Meeting, the Council receives reports from the Australian Statistician on relevant ABS business. Similarly, Council Members have an opportunity to provide reports to the ABS for consideration and discussion.

At the July 2024 meeting, the Council noted the ABS received significant additional funding in the 2024–25 Budget for initiatives including Big Data, Timely Insights 2, the Life Course Data Initiative, and rephasing and augmenting of the 2026 Census budget. However, the Council noted this additional funding could only be applied to these initiatives and could not address funding challenges facing business-as-usual operations.

At the July meeting, the Council received an update on the Data Acquisition Modernisation Program, including the history and vision for the Program. The Council acknowledged conducting surveys has become increasingly costly and challenging in recent years. Response rates to ABS surveys have been declining, an experience common to national statistical organisations around the world. The Council noted the primary focus for the next six months will be on detailed planning for the next phase of the program. As part of the detailed planning process, the ABS has committed to developing a case for further investment, which will support conversations with the Government on resourcing for the program moving forwards. During the November meeting, the ABS acknowledged funding received as part of the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook to complete the Data Acquisition Modernisation Program.

At the March meeting, the Council discussed the upcoming international updates to the following standards and classification: System of National Accounts 2025 (SNA25); Balance of Payments standard 7 (BPM7); and Industrial Classification. Implementing the changes to SNA25, BPM7 and Industrial Classification is a significant undertaking, at a time when the ABS is already committed to substantial transformation through Big Data, Timely Insights 2 and Data Acquisition Modernisation. The Council discussed the complexity of the changes, the lengthy development window, financial support required and what other national statistical organisations are planning. The Council discussed the level of discretion available in implementing the changes, when funding would be required, and the need for a compelling narrative that should outline how Australia's industry data must be updated given the changes in the economy over the past 15–20 years. The Council was open to delaying the implementation for two or three years to ensure these updates could be fully implemented rather than staged. State and Territory Members noted the Industrial classification changes should be prioritised.

During 2024–25 the Council received frequent updates on the Life Course Data Initiative (LCDI), noting the ABS will publish statistical outputs from the LCDI on the ABS website in late 2025. Findings from LCDI research projects will be available from 2026. The ABS will also develop and publish a new child-level composite indicator of child well-being, in consultation with expert stakeholders, to be published from 2026. The Council noted that, during 2025, the ABS will engage with all

jurisdictions to update them on the progress of the project and seek input on the enablers and blockers in participating in any potential future opportunities.

2. Assist in clarifying ABS roles and responsibilities within an evolving data landscape

Community trust remained a central focus throughout 2024–25, with the Council providing guidance as the ABS responded to statistical errors and implemented enhanced quality management processes.

At the November meeting, the ABS reported errors in estimates of the Child Care Subsidy impact. As detailed in a media statement released on 19 November 2025, corrections were made to the October 2024 Monthly CPI indicator and December quarter 2024 CPI to ensure policymakers and the public received accurate information about child care pricing dynamics.

The Council received a detailed briefing at the March meeting on the ABS's comprehensive response to recent statistical errors, including the release of a Process Quality Management Toolbox in February 2025. The Council welcomed the commencement of Independent Process Quality Reviews, starting with the Labour Force Survey. The Council discussed the cultural shift required to implement these processes, the importance of having quality checks for both processes and outputs, and the benefits of the Independent Process Quality Reviews.

At the March meeting, the Council was updated on the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Alfred on the Monthly Population Survey, with the ABS demonstrating proactive monitoring and quality assurance approaches to maintain high-quality Labour Force statistics.

3. Assist in building and maintaining community trust

At the March meeting, the Australian Statistician outlined the error in enrolment projections data that the ABS supplied to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) for use in the redistributions of electoral boundaries in Victoria and Western Australia. The error was corrected, and new data supplied quickly, with the AEC confirming that the redistribution process continued with its planned timetable.

The Council noted the Australian Statistician commissioned former Australian Statistician Dennis Trewin AO to undertake a review to examine ABS processes to reduce the possibility of similar errors occurring in the release of ABS statistics and to advise of potential areas of risk in current processes.

Mr Trewin's review, which was published on the [ABS website \(https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-statements/statistical-review-process-providing-regional-enrolment-projections-electoral-redistribution-purposes\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-statements/statistical-review-process-providing-regional-enrolment-projections-electoral-redistribution-purposes), made several recommendations specific to the enrolment projections process as well as some general lessons to strengthen and reinforce the importance of quality managements arrangements within ABS. These findings will be combined with those from an internal audit of statistical quality gates which the ABS had commissioned before this incident.

The Council requested an update be provided at a future meeting to understand the actions being undertaken to maintain users' trust and confidence in ABS outputs.

4. Advise on opportunities

During 2024–25 the Council advised the ABS on emerging statistical challenges and opportunities across the jurisdictions and sectors represented. The Council noted the importance of data to inform state and territory priorities, such as housing.

The Council received regular updates on the Retail Trade replacement project throughout 2024–25. Enhancements to the Monthly Household Spending Indicator have enabled the ABS to cease the Retail Trade publication on 31 July 2025 (referencing the June 2025 period), providing users with a more comprehensive view of household consumption and eliminating the need for businesses to respond to the Retail Business Survey.

At the July meeting, the ABS showcased the Whole of Australian Government Coding Service, which was released for

government use in June 2025 and will be used for the 2026 Census. The Council discussed opportunities across government for using the coder and what additional value could be delivered by the addition of functionality to the service.

At the March meeting, the Council was briefed on the significant success of the data integration program, with 427 active projects in the DataLab and over 2,000 current users, indicating these ABS services are operating at scale. The Council discussed ongoing challenges the ABS is trying to address, such as improved access, holdings of integrated data for researchers and the financial position of the program. The Council was complimentary of the ABS's data integration program, which provides an excellent resource for government and the broader community.

5. Monitor and advise on the 2026 Census program

The 2026 Census remained a critical focus, with the Council providing ongoing advice as the Census Program navigates topic decisions, privacy assessments, and operational preparations.

At the July meeting, the Council noted the ABS had made recommendations to Government on Census content changes and timing, with the timeline requiring tight decision-making due to the upcoming Federal election.

The Council was informed at the November meeting that the Government had decided Census topics, with the new topic on sexual orientation and gender aligning with ABS recommendations. The ABS also explained to the Council its decision to cancel the planned Census Test in September 2024, and how it will adjust testing plans to prepare for a successful Census.

The Council was also briefed on the privacy-by-design approach for the 2026 Census, with the Phase 2 Privacy Impact Assessment completed by Information Integrity Solutions and published on the ABS website in December 2024.

At the March meeting, the Council noted the outcomes of the 2026 Census topic review, which were published on the ABS website in February 2025, with the Australian Government successfully tabling amendments to the Census and Statistics Regulation 2016.

The Council also noted that the Census Program will conduct a large-scale, public-facing Operational Readiness Exercise for the Census in August 2025, which will provide critical evidence of Census staff and vendor readiness for 2026, through the comprehensive testing of almost all Census systems and processes.

The Council was also informed at the March meeting that final questions for the 2026 Census will be published on the ABS website in late 2025. This will allow time to make minor refinements to the wording of questions following the Census Test, if required.

Chapter 3: Looking forward: 2025–26 ASAC Statement of Intent

Purpose and Role of ASAC

The legislation, purpose, and role of ASAC will remain unchanged from 2024–25.

In line with its legislated functions, ASAC will continue to represent government and community interests by advising the Minister and the Australian Statistician on Australia's current and longer-term statistical priorities and ABS' strategies to deliver them.

As an advisory forum with broad membership and understanding of developments in the wider environment, ASAC will:

- advise the Minister and the ABS as appropriate in relation to ABS functions
- provide input into the strategic directions, risks, priorities and key deliverables of the ABS
- advocate for an effective national statistical system and support the ABS' role within it
- report annually to the Parliament.

To help the ABS respond to issues and plan, ASAC will:

- provide the ABS with frank advice and feedback
- draw on the expertise of ASAC members and seek input from stakeholders
- help identify risks and raise potential issues
- provide guidance where needed to ensure the ABS remains a trusted and relevant data provider.

The Chair of ASAC will convey advice to the Minister as appropriate and report back to the Council.

Priorities for 2025–26

The priorities for the Council remain unchanged for 2025–26:

- Advise on the ABS work program under resource constraints to ensure the ongoing needs of government and stakeholders for quality data can be met in a timely, efficient, and effective manner.
- Assist in clarifying ABS roles and responsibilities within an evolving data landscape, including in data integration and access, strengthening data security, and in promoting an effective national statistical system.
- Assist in building and maintaining community trust, including through supporting ABS activities, identifying potential reputational risks and advising on stakeholder engagement.
- Advise on opportunities to enhance statistical capabilities across the public sector and beyond.
- Monitor and advise on the 2026 Census program in light of lessons learned from the 2021 Census, including potential innovations in the conduct of the Census and longer-term possibilities for the Census.

2025–26 proposed activities

The Council will meet three times in 2025–26: July 2025 (Sydney), November 2025 (Canberra) and March 2026 (Melbourne).

Appendix 1: Membership of ASAC as at 30 June 2025

Member	Date first appointed	Meetings attended during 2024–25
Prof Emeritus Ian Harper AO		28 February 2022
Dr David Gruen AO		11 December 2019
	Australian Statistician (ex officio) Australian Bureau of Statistics	
Prof Lisa Jackson Pulver AM		8 April 2013
	Deputy Vice Chancellor The University of Sydney	
Dr Luci Ellis		2 November 2015
	Chief Economist, Westpac Banking Group	
Mr Stephen Walters		2 November 2015
	Chief Economist Business Council Australia	
Prof Elizabeth Webster		29 August 2024
	Director of the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne	
Ms Gayle Milnes		12 October 2022
	National Data Commissioner Office of the National Data Commissioner	
Mr Andrew Barker		12 March 2025
	Head of Research Committee for Economic Development of Australia	
Prof Robert Breunig		12 October 2022
	Director, Tax and Transfer Policy Institute Chair of Tax Policy and Public Finance Professor of Economics, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University	
Prof Nicholas Biddle		20 January 2023
	Head of the School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University	
Dr Shane Johnson		8 September 2023
	First Assistant Secretary, Macroeconomic Analysis and Policy Division, Department of the Treasury	
Dr Sarah Hunter		1 March 2024
	Assistant Governor/Chief Economist, Reserve Bank of Australia	

State/Territory Representatives	Date first appointed	Meetings attended during 2024–25
Ms Joann Wilkie	Deputy Secretary for the Economic Strategy and Productivity Group, New South Wales Treasury	12 November 2022
Mr Paul Donegan	Deputy Secretary, Economic Division Department of Treasury and Finance, Victoria	1 March 2024
Mr Antony Skinner	Government Statistician Queensland Treasury	8 April 2013
Mr Michael Andrews	Assistant Under Treasurer (Economic) Department of Treasury, Western Australia	1 March 2024
Mr Mathew Healey	Deputy Secretary Strategy and Delivery Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet	11 February 2025
Mr Mick Butler	Deputy Under Treasurer, Department of Treasury and Finance, Northern Territory	3 May 2021
Mr Greg Raymond	Executive Director, Revenue and Economics, South Australian Department of Treasury and Finance	4 March 2025

The Minister appointed the following members to the Council during 2024–25:

- Prof Elizabeth Webster
- Mr Andrew Barker
- Mr Mathew Healey
- Mr Greg Raymond

The following members were farewelled in 2024–25, with thanks for their contributions to the Council:

- Ms Melinda Cilento
- Prof Abigail Payne
- Mr Stephen Miners
- Ms Tammie Pribanic
- Mr Todd Crawford

Appendix 2: ASAC 2024–25 meeting agendas

17 July 2024

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Minutes and action items from previous meeting
3. Statistician's report
4. Members' reports
5. Data Acquisition Modernisation

6. Maximising the investment of the Life Course Data Initiative
7. ABS Census/Whole of Australian Government Coding Capability
8. Other business

20 November 2024

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Minutes and action items from previous meeting
3. Statistician's report
4. Members' reports
5. Framework for the Governance for Indigenous Data
6. Data sharing, trust and confidence of custodians
7. Census Update
8. Other business

28 March 2025

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Minutes and action items from previous meeting
3. Statistician's report
4. Members' reports
5. Update on the ABS data integration program
6. Quality Assurance
7. Advancing economic statistics for the contemporary economy
8. Other business

Appendix 3: Freedom of Information

In accordance with section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act 1982, details of the structure and functions of ASAC and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by the Council are outlined below.

Establishment, organisation and functions

For information regarding the establishment, organisation and function of ASAC, see Chapter 1 – About ASAC.

Powers

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. The Council does not administer any enactments or schemes.

Arrangements for outside participation

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS to ensure a broad range of views and interests are reflected in the advice that the Council offers to the Minister and the Australian Statistician. For membership details, see Appendix 1.

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government administration may contribute matters for the Council's consideration by making representations to the Minister or the ASAC Chair. Contributions can be directed in writing to the ASAC Secretariat at the address below.

Information available

The ASAC Annual Report is available on the ABS website. The ABS maintains records on behalf of ASAC relating to: the

administration of the Council; papers discussed at Council meetings; summary records of meeting proceedings; and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

Feedback and enquiries

ASAC welcomes feedback on this report. Feedback or enquiries related to accessing ASAC documents, including enquiries under the Freedom of Information Act 1982, may be directed in writing (by post or email) to:

Secretariat

Australian Statistics Advisory Council

c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics

Locked Bag 10

Belconnen ACT 2616

Email: asac@abs.gov.au (<mailto:asac@abs.gov.au>)